

Extending the Lesson—Lesson 3

The African American Perspective Letter 1

Mother of a Northern Black Soldier to the President

Buffalo [N.Y.] July 31 1863

Excellent Sir My good friend says I must write to you and she will send it. My son went in the 54th regiment. I am a colored woman and my son was strong and able as any to fight for his country and the colored people have as much to fight for as any. My father was a Slave and escaped from Louisiana before I was born morn forty years ago. I have but poor edication but I never went to schol, but I know just as well as any what is right between man and man. Now I know it is right that a colored man should go and fight for his country, and so ought to a white man. I know that a colored man ought to run no greater risques than a white, his pay is no greater his obligation to fight is the same. So why should not our enemies be compelled to treat him the same, Made to do it.

My son fought at Fort Wagoner but thank God he was not taken prisoner, as many were. I thought of this thing before I let my boy go but then they said Mr. Lincoln will never let them sell our colored soldiers for slaves, if they do he will get them back quick. He will rettallyate and stop it. Now Mr Lincoln dont you think you oght to stop this thing and make them do the same by the colored men they have lived in idleness all their lives on stolen labor and made savages of the colored people, but they now are so furious because they are proving themselves to be men, such as have come away and got some edication. It must not be so. You must put the rebels to work in State prisons to making shoes and things, if they sell our colored soldiers, till they let them all go. And give their wounded the same treatment. It would seem cruel, but their no other way, and a just man must do hard things sometimes, that shew him to be a great man. They tell me some do you will take back the Proclamation, don't do it. when you are dead and in Heaven, in a thousand years that action of yours will make the Angels sing your praises I know it. ought one man to own another, law for or not, who made the law, surely the poor slave did not. So it is wicket, and a horrible Outrage, there is no sense in it, because a man has lived by robbing all his life and his father before him, should he complain because the stolen things found on him are taken. Robbing the colored people of their labor is but a small part of the robbery their souls are almost taken, they are made bruits of often. You know all about this

Will you see that the colored men fighting now, are fairly treated. You ought to do this, and do it at once, Not let the thing run along meet it quickly and manfully, and stop this, mean cowardly cruelty

Hannah Johnson.

[In another handwriting] Hon. Mr. Lincoln The above speaks for itself Carrie Coburn

Hannah Johnson to Hon. Mr. Lincoln, 31 July 1863, J-17 1863, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives

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The African American Perspective Questions Letter 1

Read the letter from the Mother of a Northern Black Soldier to the President, July 31, 1863 and consider the questions that follow:

Letter from the Mother of a Northern Black Soldier to the President, July 31, 1863

- Who wrote this letter?
- What do you know about this individual from the letter?
- Under what circumstances was this letter written?
- Why was this letter written, i.e., what action(s) does the author request of President Lincoln?
- Upon what grounds does she make her request?
- What most concerns her regarding the Proclamation?
- What do we learn from this letter about emancipation?
- How would you describe the tone of this letter? Is the tone important? Why or why not?

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The African American Perspective Letter 2

Massachusetts Black Corporal to the President

Morris Island [S.C.]. Sept 28th 1863

Your Excelency will pardon the presumption of an humble individual like myself, in addressing you. but the earnest Solicitation of my Comrades in Arms, besides the genuine interest felt by myself in the matter is my excuse, for placing before the Executive head of the Nation our Common Grievance: On the 6th of last Month the Paymaster of the department, informed us, that if we would decide to receive the sum of \$10 (ten dollars) per month, he would come and pay us that sum, but, that, on the sitting of Congress, the Regt would, in his opinion, be *allowed* the other 3 (three). He did not give us any guarantee that this would be, as he hoped, certainly *he* had no authority for making any such guarantee, and we can not suppose him acting in any way interested. Now the main question is. Are we *Soldiers*, or are we LABOURORS. We are fully armed, and equipped, have done all the various Duties, pertaining to a Soldiers life, have conducted ourselves, to the complete satisfaction of General Officers, who, were if any, prejudices *against* us, but who now accord us all the encouragement, and honour due us: have shared the perils, and Labour, of Reducing the first stronghold, that flaunted a Traitor Flan: and more Mr President/ Today, the Anglo Saxon Mother, Wife, or Sister, are not alone, in tears for departed Sons, Husbands, and Brothers. The patient Trusting Decendants of Abrics Clime, have dyed the ground with blood, in defense of the Union, and Democracy. Men too your Excellency, who know in a measure, the cruelties of the Iron heel of oppression, which in years gone by, the very Power, their blood is not being spilled to maintain, ever ground them to the dust. Bht When the war trumpet sounded o'er the land, when men knew not the Friend from the Traitor, the Black man laid his life at the Altar of the Nation,--and he was refused. When the arms of the Union, were beaten, in the first year of the War, And the Executive called more food for its ravaging maw, and again the black man begged, the privelege of Aiding his Country in her need, to be again refused, And now, he is in the War: and how has he conducted himself? Let their dusky forms, rise up, out the mires of James Island, and give the answer. Let the rich mould around Wagners parapets be upturned, and there will be found an Eloquent answer. Obedient and patient, and Solid as a wall are they. all we lack, is a paler hue, and a better acquaintance with the Alphabet. Now Your Excellency, We have done a Soldiers Duty. Why cant we have a Soldiers pay? You caution the Rebel Chieftain, that the United States, knows, no distinction, in her Soldiers: She insists on having all her Soldiers, of whatever, creed of Color, to be treated, according to the usages of War. Now if the United States exacts uniformity of treatment of her Soldiers, from the Insurgents, would it not be well, and consistent, to set the example herself, by paying all her *Soldiers* alike? We of this Regt. were not enlisted under any "contraband" act. But we do not wish to be understood, as rating

our Service, of more Value to the Government, than the service of the exslave, Their Service *is* undoubtedly worth much to the Nation, but Congress made express, provision touching their case, as slaves freed by military necessity, and assuming the Government, to be their temporary Guardian:--Not so with us—Freemen by birth, and consequently, having the advantage of *thinking*, and acting for ourselves, so far as the Laws would allow us. We do not consider ourselves fit subjects for the Contraband act. We appeal to You, Sir: as the Executive of the Nation, to have us Justly Dealt with. The Regt, do pray, that they be assured their service will be fairly appreciated, by paying them as American SOLDIERS, not as menial hirelings. Black men You man well know, are poor, three dollars per month, for a wear, will suply their needy Wives, and little ones, with fuel. If you, as Chief Magistrate of the Nation, will assure us, of our whole pay. We are content, our Patriotism, our enthusiasm will have a new impetus, to exert our energy more and more to aid Our Country. Not that our hearts every flagged, in Devotion, in spite the evident apathy displayed in our behalf, but We feel as though, our Country spurned us, now we are sworn to serve her.

Please give this a moments attention

James Henry Gooding

Corporal James Henry Gooding to Abraham Lincoln, 28 Sept. 1863, enclosed in [Harper & Brothers] to [Abraham Lincoln], 12 Oct. 1863, H-133 1863, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives

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The African American Perspective Questions Letter 2

Read the letter of a Massachusetts Black Corporal to the President, September 28, 1863 written by Corporal James H. Gooding of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry (the troops celebrated in the film *Glory*), which complains to Lincoln of unequal pay for white and African American soldiers and consider the questions that follow:

Letter of a Massachusetts Black Corporal to the President, September 28, 1863

- Who wrote this letter?
- What do we know about this individual?
- Under what circumstances was this letter written?
- Why was this letter written, i.e., what “common grievance” motivates the author to write to Lincoln?
- What important distinction does he bring to the attention of Lincoln?
- List some of the facts which he uses to support this distinction.
- Why does the author not consider himself “fit subjects for the Contraband act”?
- Why does he address Lincoln as the “chief Magistrate of the Nation”?
- How would you describe the tone of this letter? Is the tone important? Why or why not?